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JOHN F. GILMAN

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# Chinese Children



By ISAAC TAYLOR HEADLAND

The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal  
Church, Rindge Literature Department  
150 Fifth Ave., New York City

## CHINESE CHILDREN.

BEFORE going to China I could not but wonder, when I saw a Chinese or Japanese doll, why it was that they made such unnatural-looking things for babies to play with. On reaching the Orient the whole matter was explained by the first Chinese or Japanese baby I met. The doll looks like the baby!

A Chinese baby is a round-faced little piece of helpless humanity, whose eyes appear as if they were simply two black marbles over which the skin had been stretched, and then a slit made on the bias. His nose is nothing more than a little kopje in the center of his face, above a yawning chasm which requires constant filling in order to secure the preservation of law and order. On his head are left small tufts of hair in various localities, which give it the appearance of the plain about Peking, on which the traveler sees, here and there, a bunch of trees around

a village or cemetery, the remainder of the country being bare. Whether he is clothed or not depends upon the season of the year. If he happens to be born in the springtime he has the pleasure of passing the first six months of his life like his first parents in the Garden of Eden. If he happens to die during the first six months of his life he is carefully wrapped up in a piece of old matting, and tenderly placed on some street corner, where he is picked up by the driver of the big black cart to which a gentle cow is hitched, and taken outside the city, where he and a large company of other small unfortunates are buried side by side in a common hole, without a monument to mark his resting place.

If he lives his life will depend upon several very important considerations, chief among which are, whether he is a boy or a girl, whether the home to which he comes happens to be a "Fifth Avenue palace" or a "Five Points 'dive,'" and whether his predecessors in the family are of the same or a different sex from himself. If he is a boy and all his predecessors are boys, well, it

"can do," the parents and nurse will say, but if he happens to be a girl, and all the others are girls, he is decidedly superfluous.

The reason for this is deeper than the mere fact of sex. It is imbedded in the social customs of the people. A girl remains at home until she is sixteen or seventeen, during which time she is little else than an expense, after which she is taken to her husband's home, and her own family have no further control over her. This, through many years and centuries, has generated a feeling in the Chinese mind that it is bad business raising girls for other folks, and there are not a few people in China who would rather take the girl that is betrothed to their own son and bring her up than to bring up their own daughter.

"The selfish beasts!" some people exclaim when they read such things about the Chinese. Yes, it is selfishness; but life in China is not like ours—a rush and a struggle to see how many luxuries one can secure—but a struggle, not after bread and rice alone, but after cornmeal and cabbage, or something not more palatable. This is the

life the great majority of Chinese children are born to.

The presumption is that a Chinese child is born with the same general disposition as an American or English child. This may be; but he certainly does not grow up with it; and, indeed, he early develops a disposition which is peculiar to the Chinese child. He is T'ao Ch'i. That almost means mischievous; it almost means troublesome—a little Tartar—but it means exactly T'ao Ch'i.

All Chinese children are not poor. There are many who are raised in an indulgence which, if not luxury and ease—for one can scarcely connect luxury and ease with brick floors and paper windows—contributes in the same way to spoiling the child. In such case he may become a little tyrant. Children raised in luxury not infrequently are quiet, dignified, manly little fellows, taught in all the rules of polite society before they reach the age of ten years.

They are taught that,

“When riding or driving you always descend  
From your horse or your cart when you meet  
with a friend;

Nor remount till your friend has passed by, I  
should say,  
A hundred, or more than that, steps on his  
way."

They are further taught that,

"When those older are standing it never is fit,  
Whether indoors or out, that a young man  
should sit."

And in all his conversation with his superiors he is taught that,

"Whenever grown people are present, a child  
Should speak with a voice that is gentle and  
mild."

Indeed, we might go on quoting a thousand lines of such teaching that the boy learns before he is ten years old. Does he practice it all? Do you practice all the good things you learned when you were a child?

For while the boy is a little man, dresses like a little man, and acts like a little man, he is also a boy, a child, and enjoys his toys and games as well as boys half around the world from him. During his childhood his nurse teaches him nursery rhymes not unlike those of our own childhood. He plays horse with his little companions; but I have always noticed that when he plays horse it

is not because he has any desire to be the horse, but the driver. He is willing to be horse for a time, in order that he may be driver for a still longer time.

All kinds of trades and employments have as great an attraction for Chinese children as for Americans. A country boy looks forward to the time when he can stand up in the cart and drive the team. Children seeing a battalion of soldiers at once "organize a company." This was amusingly illustrated by a company of children in Peking during the Chinese-Japanese war. They had organized a company. Each had a stick or a weed for a gun, except the drummer boy, who was drumming on an old fruit can. They went through various maneuvers for practice, no doubt, and all seemed to be going on swimmingly until one of those in front shouted out, in a voice filled with fear:

"The Japanese are coming! The Japanese are coming!" which was the signal for a general retreat, and the children, in true imitation of the real army, retreated in disorder and dismay in every direction.

It is this attraction for the various em-

ployments which makes shovels, hoes, pails, chests of tools, and all such usefully useless instruments such appropriate gifts for children in China as well as in America. Chinese children play all kinds of toy trades and professions that are practiced by their parents. Listen to the song sung by the child as it plays doctor:

"A purse, a purse, for better or worse,  
Indeed, would you know it, I've married a purse.  
My wife's little daughter she fell very ill,  
And we called for a doctor to give her a pill.  
He wrote a prescription which now we will give  
her,  
In which he has ordered a mosquito's liver,  
And then in addition the heart of a flea,  
And half pound of fly wings to make her some  
tea."

When the child who is put to attend the baby sees two men sawing up logs with a crosscut saw he puts the child on his knees, and, taking hold of its hands, the two sway back and forth, while he sings:

"We pull the big saw,  
We push the big saw,  
To saw up the wood,  
To build us a house,  
In order that baby  
May have a good spouse."



Indeed, every phase of business and professional life is turned into games by Chinese children.

The boys also indulge in acrobatic sports. The horizontal bar is as much used by Chinese as by American children. For this purpose they invoke the aid of a friendly tree limb, or if that is not to be found two boys put the pole on their shoulders, while a third "skins the cat," hangs suspended by his legs, his feet, or his hands or elbows, or whirls around on his stomach as our own children. These games are not confined to boys. Girls may be seen in little groups playing "jackstones" with small pebbles, "turning the mill," or "churning butter," while they sing:

"The big dog's gone to the city,  
The little dog's run away,  
The egg has fallen and broken,  
And the oil's leaked out, they say,  
But you be a roller,  
And hull with power,  
And I'll be a millstone,  
And grind the flour."

Theoretically, of course, girls are kept in the house, and are taught; and practically

those of the better classes are. They are taught in their small primers that,

“You should rise from bed as early in the morning as the sun,  
Nor retire at evening’s closing till your work is wholly done.”

A girl is taught to do all kinds of fancy work, to “keep her hair combed smooth and shiny,” to keep her “lilies bound tight and tidy,” never to talk about her aunts or other members of the family, never to “stand gazing from the door” nor to “lean against the doorpost.” And she is asked:

“Have you ever learned the reason for the binding of your feet?

’Tis from fear that ’twill be easy to go out upon the street.”

And again:

“Have you ever learned the reason why your ears should punctured be?

’Tis that you may never listen to the talk of Chang and Li.”

Indeed, her instructions, though different, are as elaborate during the first few years of her life as those of her brother, though it is not quite so certain that she pursues them.

The books that have been written by very many people on children in China, we are inclined to believe, do not properly represent child life in that great empire. It is understood, of course, that their life is not to be compared with the lives of children in Europe and America; and, further, it should be remembered that the pleasures of child life are not measured by the gratification of every childish whim. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" may not be a good principle, but it contains a grain of truth which is not unimportant. Many of the little street children who have to spend a large part of their time in efforts to help support the family, or in taking care of the baby, enjoy themselves more in a single day, when they are allowed to go to the city to a fair or out of the city on a picnic, than the child of wealth in a whole month of idleness. In addition to the games and rhymes the Chinese child is allowed to go to the fairs which are held in the great Buddhist temples in different parts of the cities, which are to him what a country fair or a Fourth of July is to an American boy or girl. He has his cash for

candy or fruit, his firecrackers, which he fires off at New Year's time, making day a time of unrest and night hideous. He has his kite-flying, which no American boy appreciates as he does, a pleasure which clings to him till he reaches his threescore years and ten, for it is not uncommon to find a child and his grandfather in the balmy days of spring out flying their kites together. He has his pet birds, which he carries around in cages or on a perch unlike any other child we have ever seen. He has his crickets, with which he plays, not "gambles," and his goldfish, which bring him days and years of delight. Indeed, the Chinese child, though in the vast majority of cases very poor, has provisions for a very good time, and if he does not have a good time it can only be regarded as his own fault.—*The Evening Post*.

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